

Telephone: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Rec'd.
7/11/07
MW.

4 November 2007

Dr Maxine Cooper
Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment
PO Box 356
Dickson ACT 2602

Dear Dr Cooper,

MANAGEMENT OF CANBERRA GRASSLANDS

I hope you don't mind me writing to you about the ACT grassland issue and the alleged impact by kangaroo overgrazing. It is good to see the Chief Minister has asked you to look into this issue. This is not a letter of complaint! I am keen that you are successful in dispelling the many myths that surround the debate about threatened species, grassland and the impact of kangaroos.

Perhaps I should mention that I am a serving Naval Officer and happen to be a member of *Wildcare*. On the one hand I am keen for Navy's reputation to be enhanced and on the other I am keen to ensure that kangaroos are not culled unnecessarily. I am not a zealot and I accept the need to cull animals where that becomes unavoidable.

I have been frustrated over the last few months by the inability of the Minister of Defence, the Defence Department, the ACT Government, the Limestone Plains Group, ACT RSPCA and other stakeholders to actually publish a scientific study that supports the view that kangaroos are responsible for placing some threatened grassland species at heightened risk. I have written to the ACT Government on three occasions and have exchanged several emails with Don Fletcher. All of this has been to no avail, as the ACT Government steadfastly refuses to provide the evidence to support their view that a wholesale cull of kangaroos at Belconnen and Majura is necessary. Defence has been more forthcoming, but has failed to provide the elusive scientific study. It seems that mere mortals like me have to simply accept the ad hoc advice of environmental scientists. But in this case I believe they have been found wanting. Many stakeholders have a conflict of interest in that they either directly work for the ACT Government or are funded by them.

My layman's view is that at Belconnen, with no wildlife corridor in or out, there is little choice but to remove the kangaroos either by culling or translocation. I see little point in leaving some kangaroos at Belconnen for experimental purposes, as has been suggested, this merely perpetuates the problem into the future. Perhaps any experimental work should be done at Tidbinbilla. At Majura the endangered area can be fenced off to allow the grassland to recover. However preventing kangaroos from grazing the grassland may not

of itself save the threatened species. Only a detailed study will identify the type of environment that needs to be created to protect the threatened species. And why focus just on Defence land? Surely the whole of the Majura valley should be considered if one is serious about protecting, and perhaps rehabilitating, threatened grassland.

What is worrying in the discussion is that by simply blaming 'skippy' we may ignore the fundamental problem. Much of the ACT and surrounding NSW region has been heavily farmed over the years and can be likened to 'clapped out sheep paddock'. In other areas there has been considerable development that has directly impacted the environment. Who is to say that in just a few years both Belconnen and the Majura valley won't simply become another suburb for residential housing and business premises? The real issue for me is to have certainty in ACT Planning and a proactive program to rehabilitate threatened grassland and not just try to protect isolated pockets.

It is pleasing that Defence has taken a conservative approach and has not simply followed the expressed opinion of the ACT Government. As you would be aware, it appears that Defence will use a mix of translocation, culling and non lethal methods to cope with the perceived kangaroo problems at Belconnen and Majura. I agree with this approach, but the long term problem of protecting grassland in the ACT and rehabilitating clapped out sheep paddocks remain.

I wish you every success in your review.

Yours sincerely



Philip Machin